

Message Text

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ACTION ARA-20

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FM AMEMBASSY SANTO DOMINGO

TO SECSTATE WASHDC 9958

C O N F I D E N T I A L SANTO DOMINGO 0914

E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: PINT

SUBJECT: DOMINICAN ELECTORAL CAMPAIGN SLOWLY
GAINING MOMENTUM

REF: SANTO DOMINGO 0517

1. SUMMARY. NOW IN ITS THIRD MONTH, THE DOMINICAN ELECTORAL CAMPAIGN HAS YET TO CATCH THE PUBLIC IMAGINATION OR GENERATE MUCH POPULAR INTEREST OR ENTHUSIASM. WHILE THE GODR HAS BEEN CONCENTRATING ITS EFFORTS ON THE TWELFTH CENTRAL AMERICAN/ CARIBBEAN GAMES, THE FRAGMENTED AND DEMORALIZED OPPOSITION, IN TRUE SISYPHEAN FASHION, SEEMS CONDEMNED TO PUSH ITS HEAVY STONE UPHILL ONLY TO HAVE IT FALL BACK ON ITS SHOULDERS. AMID OFFICIAL COMPLACENCY, THE OPPOSITION IS BESET BY DIVISION AND HAS BEEN UNABLE TO OFFER A CANDIDATE WHO MIGHT CONSTITUTE A VIABLE CHALLENGE TO BALAGUER AT THE POLLS THIS MAY. AS THE TWELFTH GAMES SUCCESSFULLY PROGRESS AND MOST DOMINICANS CONTINUE TO EVINCE BULLISHNESS ABOUT THE FUTURE, THE PROSPECTS FOR THE PRESIDENT'S REELECTION HAVE NEVER SEEMED MORE ASSURED. END SUMMARY.

2. THE DOMINICAN ELECTORAL CAMPAIGN, WHICH IS NOW ENTERING ITS THIRD MONTH, HAS BEEN CHARACTERIZED THUS
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FAR BY THE GENERAL ABSENCE OF MAJOR POLITICAL

DEVELOPMENTS OR OF THE SIGNIFICANT RISE IN PUBLIC TENSION AND EXCITEMENT WHICH USUALLY ACCOMPANY DOMINICAN ELECTIONS. PRESIDENT BALAGUER'S REFORMIST PARTY HAS NOT YET HELD ITS NATIONAL CONVENTION TO NOMINATE ITS TOP CANDIDATES ALTHOUGH VIRTUALLY EVERYONE HERE ENVISAGES BALAGUER'S RENOMINATION (AND SUBSEQUENT REELECTION). DURING MOST OF FEBRUARY, THE GODR CONTINUED TO FOCUS ITS ATTENTION ON PREPARATIONS FOR THE TWELFTH CENTRAL AMERICAN/CARIBBEAN GAMES WHICH WERE SUCCESSFULLY AND SPECTACULARLY INAUGURATED FEBRUARY 27. THE APPARENT LOW LEVEL OF OFFICIAL ATTENTION ACCORDED TO THE ELECTION CAMPAIGN TO DATE REFLECTS THE GROWING CONFIDENCE, IF NOT COMPLACENCY, OF THE GODR WHICH VIDENTLY PERCEIVES LITTLE REAL POSSIBILITY OF LOSING AT THE POLLS. IN A SHOW OF SOME MILD INTEREST IN THE CAMPAIGN, HOWEVER, THE REFORMISTAS HAVE SPONSORED TWO LARGE POLITICAL DEMONSTRATIONS, ONE IN THE EAST (LA ROMANA) AND THE OTHER IN THE SOUTHWEST (BARAHONA). ACCORDING TO PRESS ACCOUNTS, BOTH WERE RELATIVELY WELL-ATTENDED, INDICATING THAT SOME OFFICIAL EFFORT HAD IN FACT BEEN MADE TO DRAW CROWDS.

3. THE OPPOSITION ON THE OTHER HAND CONTINUES TO BE PLAGUED BY INTERNAL DIVISIONS AND INTERNECINE STRUGGLES WHICH HAVE SEVERELY LIMITED ITS EFFECTIVENESS AND POPULAR APPEAL. AFTER SEVERAL FALSE STARTS, THE FOUR SO-CALLED SANTIAGO ACCORD PARTIES AGREED TO BACK SILVESTRE ANTONIO GUZMAN AS A NATIONAL UNITY CANDIDATE FOR PRESIDENT. THE SOFT-SPOKEN AND GENTLE GUZMAN, JUAN BOSCH'S FORMER AGRICULTURE MINISTER AND A SUCCESSFUL FORMER-CATTLEMEN, HOWEVER, SEEMINGLY LACKS THE POLITICAL EXPERIENCE, ORATORICAL SKILLS, DYNAMISM, AND CHARISMA NECESSARY TO PROVIDE THE LEADERSHIP OR POPULAR APPEAL TO GENERATE ENTHUSIASM AND SUPPORT AMONG DOMINICAN VOTERS.

4. IN THE MEANTIME, OTHER PRESIDENTIAL HOPEFULS HAVE TOSSED THEIR HATS INTO THE POLITICAL RING: EX-VICE PRESIDENT LIC. FRANCISCO AUGUSTO LORA FOR THE

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DEMOCRATIC INTEGRATION MOVEMENT (MIDA) AND DR. JAIME MANUEL FERNANDEZ OF THE NATIONAL CONCILIATION MOVEMENT (MCN). BOTH, HOWEVER, CONTINUE THEIR BEHIND-THE-SCENES MANEUVERING IN AN EFFORT TO ENHANCE THEIR OWN ELECTORAL PROSPECTS. IN ADDITION, THE SELF-STYLED "BLOC OF NATIONAL DIGNITY" COMPOSED OF TWELVE MINOR PARTIES, INCLUDING SIX SPLINTER MARXIST-LENINIST GROUPS, AND LED BY THE NATIONAL LIBERATION

PARTY'S JUAN BOSCH, WAS RESUSITATED BY THE FORMER PRD LEADER ON FEBRUARY 20. IT IS UNCLEAR WHAT BOSCH HAS IN MIND FOR THE BLOC, HOWEVER, FOR HE HAS REPEATEDLY STRESSED THAT HE WILL NOT PARTICIPATE IN THE UPCOMING ELECTIONS. GIVEN HIS CONTINUING VITUPERATIVE ATTACKS ON THE SANTIAGO ACCORD PARTIES, THE REAL PURPOSE OF THE BLOC MAY WELL BE TO ATTEMPT TO DESTROY PENA GOMEZ AND HIS DOMINICAN REVOLUTIONARY PARTY (PRD).

5. PRESIDENT BALAGUER'S GAMBLE TO HOLD THE TWELFTH GAMES IN THE MIDST OF THE ELECTORAL CAMPAIGN APPEARS TO BE PAYING OFF AS MOST DOMINICANS' ATTENTION IS RIVETED ON THE DAILY SPORTING EVENTS AND THUS DIVERTED FROM POLITICS. THE SMOOTHNESS AND RELATIVELY EFFICIENCY WITH WHICH THE GAMES HAVE PROCEEDED THUS FAR HAVE COME AS A PLEASANT SURPRISE TO MANY DOMINICANS AND PROVIDED THEM WITH A NEW-FOUND AND JUSTIFIABLE PRIDE IN THIS MAJOR NATIONAL UNDERTAKING. BALAGUER, OF COURSE, WHO WAS THE MOTOR FORCE BEHIND THE GAMES, HAS BEEN QUIETLY RECEIVING THE POLITICAL SPINOFF FROM THIS INTERNATIONAL EVENT.

6. MEANWHILE, DESPITE THE INFLUX INTO THE DOMINICAN REPUBLIC OF MORE THAN 500 CUBANS AND THOUSANDS OF OTHER ATHLETES AND VISITORS, THE SECURITY SITUATION REMAINS SURPRISINGLY TRANQUIL AND FREE OF TENSION. INDICATIVE THAT A SENSE OF NATIONAL OPTIMISM IS WIDESPREAD IS THE FACT THAT THE BUSINESS SECTOR CONTINUES TO MANIFEST ITS CONFIDENCE IN THE FUTURE BY MAINTAINING THE TEMPO OF NEW INVESTMENT. INDEED, USING PREVIOUS YEARS' EXPERIENCE AS A STANDARD, ONE IS OFTEN HARD-PRESSED TO REALIZE THAT A DOMINICAN PRESIDENTIAL ELECTION CAMPAIGN IS IN FACT UNDERWAY.
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